

forum news

Published by National Trust Forum, a program of the Center for Preservation Leadership, National Trust for Historic Preservation • July/August 2006 • Volume XII • No. 6

New Tools to Fight Teardowns

by Adrian Scott Fine and National Trust Staff

The problem of teardowns isn't going away.

The National Trust sounded the alarm back in 2002 when it put "Teardowns in Historic Neighborhoods, Nationwide" on its list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. The listing warned: "Across the nation a teardown epidemic is wiping out historic neighborhoods one house at a time. As older homes are demolished and replaced with dramatically larger, out-of-scale new structures, the historic character of the existing neighborhood is lost. Neighborhood livability is diminished as trees are removed, backyards are eliminated, and sunlight is blocked by towering new structures built up to the property lines. Community economic and social diversity is reduced as new mansions replace affordable homes. House by house, neighborhoods are losing a part of their historic fabric and much of their character."

Back in 2002, the National Trust had identified 100 commu-

nities in 20 states that were experiencing teardowns in historic neighborhoods. In 2006 that number is climbing fast, with the National Trust now documenting more than 300 communities in 33 states affected by teardowns. Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and California are among the hardest hit states. The problem is especially prevalent around thriving urban areas, where growing numbers of people want the convenience, short commute, and ambiance of living in an established city or inner-ring neighborhood, but also want homes with the vast square footage, amenities, and multi-car garages better suited to a large suburban lot.

Kenilworth, Ill.: 2006 11 Most Endangered Site

The village of Kenilworth, Ill., provides one particularly disturbing example of this mushrooming national trend. By placing Kenil-

worth on its 2006 11 Most Endangered Places list, the National Trust hopes to promote awareness and rally action to turn the trend around in this community and others across the country.

Kenilworth, just north of Chicago, was one of the first planned communities in the country, envisioned by its turn-of-the-20th-century founder as an ideal suburb offering a retreat from the dirt, noise, and crowding of the city. Some of the most distinguished architects in the Midwest were enlisted to design its residences, public buildings, parks, and gardens, including Daniel H. Burnham, Franklin P. Burnham, George W. Maher, and Jens Jensen. Their work contributed to a tapestry of good design in the village, creating houses and settings that were—and are—works of art. Most of the 830 homes in the community are more than 80 years old, with many over 100 years old.

But now the village is being blindsided by teardowns. Teardowns are occurring at an alarming rate, with 47 houses already lost to demolition. Nearly half of the losses have occurred during the last three years, including several homes designed by the most prominent architects involved in the village's design. Many of these lost architectural gems have been replaced with new houses that are significantly larger in size and not in sync with the style and character

inside

Advocacy for Kentucky Tax Credit	3
State and Local Updates	4
Publications and Deadlines	5
Newsmakers	5
Calendar of Events	7
Notable Quotes	8
Preservation Internet Resources	Insert



When an out-of-scale new house replaces an existing home, it disrupts the look and feel of the neighborhood as whole. Even worse, one teardown may set off a chain reaction that can soon overwhelm a community. A street in the Washington, D.C., metro area is shown here. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine.

continued on page 2



Renowned Prairie School architect George Maher designed more than 40 houses and public buildings in Kenilworth, including this one (1896) which he considered to be the "ideal suburban home." Although Citizens for Kenilworth mounted a coordinated effort to save it, including sending flyers to all homeowners in the village, it was demolished in 2005. Photo by Cameel Halim.

of the neighborhoods.

Time is now the enemy. The village did not anticipate the teardown threat and has no comprehensive plan to stop it.

In the face of a laissez-faire village government and a "property rights" faction among local residents, it has been left up to private citizens to organize, educate the community, and press for action. Over the past three years, a coalition of teardown opponents has succeeded in electing two preservation-minded members to the village board and enacting numerous zoning code changes, a tree preservation ordinance, and a six-month moratorium on building permits. The organization Citizens for Kenil-

worth has worked to build public and media interest and to save individual houses from demolition (two saved so far). The village board's newly formed Ad Hoc Committee for Community Planning is now getting a start on assessing design review procedures and drafting a comprehensive plan.

But without quick action—particularly enactment of a local landmark ordinance and designation program as well as further zoning reforms—this unique historic community will be irreparably compromised...or lost.

Lessons from Other Communities

As the epidemic of teardowns spreads, so, fortunately, does awareness of the planning tools and strategies that can be used to fight the problem.

Communities attempting to manage teardowns and their big-house impacts are pursuing a variety of approaches. These tools—some new, others well tested—generally slow down teardowns in one of two ways: by reducing or eliminating the economic pressure for teardowns through changes to zoning regulations that limit the

square footage that can be built on a given lot or by encouraging compatible design through various means, including new construction standards, design review procedures, special neighborhood "overlay" districts, financial incentives, and education programs.

- **Dallas, Tex.:** As an alternative to conservation and historic districts, the City of Dallas has developed a new tool, the Neighborhood Stabilization Overlay Zone, to offer residents of a specified area a plan that can set standards for the height, garage orientation and location, front and side setbacks, front facade area, and total square footage for new buildings, including garages.

- **Salt Lake City, Utah:** The City of Salt Lake City has passed the Compatible Residential Infill Development Ordinance, an experimental tiered review process that addresses issues such as height, setbacks, lot coverage, garages, additions, demolition, and fines. The customized process resulted after lengthy discussions with stakeholders citywide and through innovative online public participation measures.

- **Atlanta, Ga., and Chevy Chase, Md.:** The city of Atlanta and the Washington, D.C., suburb of Chevy Chase may not appear to have a lot in common, but both areas are struggling with rampant teardowns and each has pursued a moratorium measure. This provides a cooling-off period to temporarily stop teardowns and give civic leaders proper time to assess their land-use and zoning policies. In defense of the moratorium in Chevy Chase, Mayor William Hudnut stated, "What

we are saying is let's take a time out for six months; take a look at where we're going as a town."

- **Queens, N.Y.:** A Queens historian has likened the teardown trend to a virus attacking the Borough's older housing. In response, a new R2A zoning classification was developed to eliminate loopholes in the previous code that allowed for the proliferation of "McMansions" and other out-of-character buildings in residential areas. Since it was introduced, the R2A has been used in areas including Cambria Heights and Bayside to down-

continued on page 6

forum news

Richard Moe
President

Peter H. Brink
Senior Vice President, Programs

Katherine Adams
Director, Center for Preservation Leadership

Elizabeth Byrd Wood
Program Manager, National Trust Forum

Kerri Rubman
Editor

Reed Beebe
Business Manager

The mission of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is to provide leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to save America's diverse places and revitalize our communities.

Forum News (ISSN 1534-2948; USPS Publication No. 013-083) is published bimonthly by the Center for Preservation Leadership at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington D.C. 20036 as a benefit of National Trust Forum membership. Forum members also receive four issues of *Forum News* and six issues of *PRESERVATION*. Annual dues are \$115. Periodicals postage paid at Washington D.C. and at additional mailing office. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Forum News*, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036. Copyright 2006 National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States. Printed in the United States. Of the total amount of base annual dues, \$6 is for a subscription to *PRESERVATION* for one year. Support for the National Trust is provided by membership dues; endowment funds; individual, corporate, and foundation contributions; and grants from state and federal agencies. *Forum News* is a forum in which to express opinions, encourage debate, and convey information of importance and of general interest to Forum members of the National Trust. Inclusion of material or product references does not constitute an endorsement by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. To obtain permission to reprint any part of this publication please call (202) 588-6053.



NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION®

National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2006 List of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places

Smithsonian Arts & Industries Building Washington, D.C.	Historic Neighborhoods of New Orleans
Blair Mountain Battlefield Logan County, W. Va.	Kenilworth, Ill.
Doo Wop Motels Wildwood, N.J.	Kootenai Lodge Bigfork, Mont.
Fort Snelling Upper Post Hennepin County, Minn.	Mission San Miguel Arcangel San Miguel, Calif.
Historic Communities and Landmarks of the Mississippi Coast	Over-the-Rhine Neighborhood Cincinnati, Ohio
	World Trade Center Vesey Street Staircase New York, N.Y.

To learn more about the threats to these places and efforts to protect them, go to www.nationaltrust.org/11most. Also watch The History Channel, which is airing public service announcements about these sites throughout the summer.

zone thousands of building lots and place limits on such things as building heights, lot coverage, and setbacks.

- **Chicago Metro Area:** Faced with the highest concentration of communities experiencing teardowns in the nation, residents and local officials in the Chicago metro area have come together to form a network of those concerned about teardowns and their impacts. Since 2003 the Chicago Suburban Alliance has been meeting; sharing information, best practices, and strategies; and serving as a resource for more than 20 Chicagoland community groups.

A New Online Resource

What can residents do if teardowns threaten to encroach on their neighborhood? How can they become informed and prepared before the trend takes hold? How can private homeowners stop this process, driven by developers who roam their streets looking for their next

"teardown target," or by sellers seeking to gain maximum profit from their biggest asset? How can residents speak out against the size of houses that their new neighbors have chosen to live in?

Local government leaders are also torn. What is the right balance between protecting historic character and respecting private property rights? What is the best way to limit the size of new homes without arguing against density or turning away new investment? Finally, how can teardown opponents effectively advocate for alternatives?

The National Trust has launched the initial phase of its online "Teardowns Resource Guide," designed to show citizens how to be proactive in taking control of their neighborhood and its future. The guide—which is posted at www.nationaltrust.org/teardowns—is a one-stop-shop for information on teardowns and the tools that are available for use to best manage this trend.

The section "Advocacy for Alternatives to Teardowns" describes strategies used by local communities across the country to manage teardowns and retain the character of historic neighborhoods. It discusses how to organize an advocacy campaign; build mutually beneficial alliances; establish constructive relationships with local planning professionals, elected officials, and the media; and develop alternatives and promote public and political support for them.

Other features of the guide include a listing of teardowns by state and community, photos that illustrate the adverse effects of teardowns on older neighborhoods, and a database of news articles. It also provides the opportunity for communities to share their own teardown experiences.

Over the coming months, the guide will add resources on "Community Visioning and Organizing," "Interim and Emergency Measures," "Overlays and Districts," "Real-Estate and Market-Based Approaches," and "Zoning and Development Standards." Check back often as the guide expands.

The Bottom Line

It's not that all change and growth is bad. Teardowns are sometimes an acceptable approach for redeveloping existing areas and increasing density, to build tax revenues in areas that are landlocked and already built out. But such development decisions should be made in the best interests of the community as a whole, not driven by the short-term financial interests of individual developers and sellers, or by the whims of new owners.

Any community experiencing teardowns must assess where it is headed, weigh short-term gains against long-term implications, and look for ways to protect the qualities that make neighborhoods strong. Through careful planning, usually involving a combination of land-use and preservation tools, it is possible to guide sensitive new development and allow neighborhoods to change without sacrificing their distinctive character.

Adrian Scott Fine is director of the National Trust's Northeast Field Office.

2006 NATIONAL PRESERVATION CONFERENCE Pittsburgh • Oct. 31–Nov. 5

Special Conference Savings for Multiple Registrations

Organizations that are Forum members can register one person at the member rate of \$275 and board and staff members from the same organization can register at \$225. So plan to bring a group, register together, and save! This offer is good until the early bird discount deadline of July 31.

Register online at www.nthpconference.org or fax your order to 514-380-5399.

Questions? Call 866-805-5725

forum
MEMBER